

Book Reviews

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HUMAN BONES. By Simon Mays. New York: Routledge. 1998. 242 pp. ISBN 0-415-17407-4. 32.99 (paper).

In the past few years, several new books focusing on bioarchaeological enquiry have appeared on the market which seem to fall into one of two categories: classroom texts or resource texts. The needs of the classroom vary with the curriculum in biological anthropology (e.g., text with or without osteology; specific course offering(s) in bioarchaeology) and audience (graduate vs. undergraduate). An appropriate classroom text at an introductory or undergraduate level should show restraint in the use of technical jargon, present osteology on a need-to-know basis, and provide current references to feed the interest of the serious student. Simon Mays' book is an entry into the still small number of texts appropriate for classroom use. It is highly readable with a minimum of jargon, and it is an informative and entertaining introductory text. Mays' approach in relating personal research experiences with British osteological collections to illustrate bioarchaeological problem-solving is effective and serves to draw the reader's interest.

The book consists of 11 chapters, covering the nature of bones and teeth, the nature of the archaeological assemblage, techniques of aging and sexing, metric and nonmetric variation, bone and dental disease, chemical analysis, and DNA testing. The overview of osteology in the first chapter covers the human skeleton in general and is succinct and well-written. The line drawing illustrations are clear and appropriate, and references for more detailed information are helpfully provided at the end of the chapter.

The second chapter discusses the nature of the archaeological assemblage (preservation, mortuary treatment). While the discussion of postdepositional processes is very well-done, the treatment of mortuary prac-

tices is too superficial. Given the breadth of literature on the subject, the use of Kroeber (1927) and Ucko (1960) as overview references is inadequate to say the least. In its favor, the discussion of mortuary treatment in southern Britain is well-written and illustrates one of the fine points of the text, the use of osteological data to illustrate archaeological problem-solving.

The discussion of adult aging and sexing techniques in Chapter 3 is well-written and presents thoughtful and very readable critical assessment of the techniques currently in use. There is also a long discussion of attrition as an aging technique. The description of subadult aging tends to exclude references not relevant for British samples (i.e., dental eruption and calcification standards). The chapter also illustrates an irksome general problem of the book, which is an infrequent use of recent references. For example, no reference for epiphyseal union postdates 1960 (p. 49). As in the discussion of mortuary treatment, the assessment of growth in archaeological samples comes from a British context (Wharram Percy). Although the topic is well-handled, the section would have benefited from the addition of references from other geographic areas.

Chapter 4 is entirely focused on cranio-metrics and their utility in addressing bio-distance questions. The scope and direction of the discussion reflect the author's interest in reasserting migration as a primary explanation for cultural change, certainly a recurring theme in European prehistory. Jomon/Ainu vs. Yayoi/Japanese craniometric results are used to model the Neolithic-Bronze Age ("Beaker Folk") transition in Britain, while a case for migration of the Beaker Folk is made primarily on the basis of the cranial index. In the interest of simply demonstrating the utility of biodistance data, the text places insufficient attention on cranial vault plasticity and the continental European data.

The short chapter devoted to nonmetric traits (Chapter 5) very ably considers the types of problem-solving possible with epi-

genetic discrete traits. Examples include kin-group elucidation (from Bronze Age Germany and central Italy at 400–500 BCE) and nonmetric variability coincidental to economic stress (19th century Portuguese). Only nominal attention is paid in this chapter to dental nonmetric traits. As in other chapters, more references from the late 1980s and early 1990s would have been helpful.

Among the best-written chapters in the book, Chapters 6 (bone disease), 7 (dental disease), and 8 (trauma) are up to date, fairly comprehensive considering the introductory level of the book, and well-illustrated. Especially helpful are photographs illustrating the difference between post-depositional damage and pathology (Figs. 6–8). Chapter 6 provides a brief overview and photographic illustration of a number of pathologies (specifically, rickets, osteoarthritis, metastatic carcinoma, tuberculosis, osteomyelitis, and clavicular syndesmosis) and, additionally, three examples of anthropological problem-solving using pathology data (i.e., origin of syphilis, osteoporosis at Wharram Percy, and anemia in the American Southwest). Chapter 7 focuses on caries and enamel hypoplasias, with examples more broadly gleaned from the bioarchaeological literature. Chapter 8 deals with trauma with an emphasis on deliberate trauma. Examples are drawn from the Libben (Ohio) site (accidental trauma), Wharram Percy (trauma consequential to osteoporosis), and medieval Wisby (blade injuries).

Mays does a fine job explaining chemical analysis (both trace element and isotope) (Chapter 9). The visuals in the discussion

section as well as for the various examples are well-done. The chapter with the greatest proportion of recent references is understandably the one discussing ancient DNA (Chapter 10). The discussion is comprehensive and also includes examples of anthropological (origin of the Easter Islanders, differential burial treatment in the Yayoi Period in Kyushu, Japan) and paleopathological (tuberculosis diagnosis in individuals without a bony signature) applications.

Cremated bone usually receives marginal treatment, if any, in bioarchaeological texts. Chapter 11 discusses cremated bone with the focus on mortuary treatment.

Mays' text is a highly readable, well-illustrated, and very engrossing personal overview of the utility of human skeletons in anthropological problem-solving. The best audience for the text is the advanced undergraduate. Many examples are understandably drawn from British archaeological contexts, but sometimes this is to the exclusion of other geographic areas. This geographic limitation often serves to belie the complexity of particular topics (e.g., growth, mortuary treatment, morphometrics) and unfortunately keeps this text somewhat provincial in scope for the North American audience.

MARIA O. SMITH

*Department of Anthropology
Northern Illinois University*

DeKalb, Illinois

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